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SUBJECT: PRT QALAT: GOVERNOR LED ERADICATION IN ZABUL

SUMMARY

1. (U) Governor Led Eradication (GLE) is underway in Zabul province and is looking to expand and cut into what could be an increase in poppy production in Zabul this growing season. Through April 15, UNODC has verified 200 hectares of eradication in the province. PRTOff observed the eradication of several fields in a district along Highway 1, though the plan for eradication in the province places priority on several districts to the north of the ring road. According to Zabul's Director of Counter Narcotics, the necessary UNODC surveyors are not yet present for the desired expansion of the eradication effort. END SUMMARY

2. (U) Governor Led Eradication efforts in Zabul province are currently focused on the Tarnak waJaldak district, the district on the ring road closest to Kandahar. PRTOff observed a morning of poppy eradication efforts on March 26 in the district, accompanied by the district leader, the district chief of police, and the Zabul Director of Counter Narcotics. Eradication in Zabul this year is new, as no eradication took place in 2005 or 2006. Through April 15, UNODC has verified 200 hectares of eradication in the province.

3. (U) PRTOff observed eradication in fields less than 100 meters off Highway 1 that were at varying levels of maturity. The first field was quite young and fairly small. Using three brand new tractors, and flanked by ANP personnel watching the surrounding ridges, drivers somewhat erratically plowed the fields under. The second, much larger field was more mature with bulbs about to flower. The farmer who owned the field was present to view the eradication. Not at all hesitant to talk to us (or have his picture taken), he complained that he grew poppy because it was easy and he could not obtain the seeds to grow legitimate crops. Noting that winter snow and rain had filled the nearby karezes (wells), he told PRTOff that irrigation was not a problem this year. Interspersed with the poppy was a legitimate

caraway crop which the farmer complained was being destroyed along with the poppy.

¶4. (U) UNODC's "Winter Assessment Survey" predicted a slight increase in cultivation in Zabul province. In 2006, UNODC estimated that Zabul cultivated 3,210 hectares (CNC reported 1,400 hectares of poppy). Embassy, responding to information that there was significant cultivation along the highway running from Kandahar to Kabul, earlier investigated the viability of using the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) to eradicate fields in the area after departing from Helmand. INL conducted an aerial reconnaissance of the region on April 1 and found that there was less cultivation than expected and an insufficient amount to make the AEF's deployment cost-effective.

¶5. (U) Zabul's Director of Counter Narcotics this spring prepared an eradication plan for the Governor, who endorsed it and directed district leaders to support eradication efforts. The highest priority districts were Mizan, Deh Chopan and Arghandab. However, these Districts were less secure than Jaldak, which is why the eradication ultimately began there. The Governor and the CN Director want to see eradication move forward in the other districts but told PRTOff that they did not have the promised UNODC surveyors required to verify the eradication. In a subsequent meeting with several of the high priority district leaders, they told PRTOff that they were ready and willing to support eradication as soon as the UNODC verification teams could arrive. (NOTE: Embassy later contacted UNODC and confirmed that three more verifiers had joined the one assigned to the province. According to UNODC, however, the verifiers have not been able to coordinate any activity with the provincial

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officials and have not observed any recent eradication. At this point in the season, eradication appears to be proceeding at a hesitant pace. Note, also, that governors often blame the absence of UNODC verifiers for insufficient eradication totals. END NOTE)

¶6. (U) The district leader from Jaldak told PRTOff that people are showing up at his office every day complaining that eradication is taking away their only livelihood and their means of feeding their families when they plow the poppy fields under. He asked for PRT assistance in helping these families. The PRT is assessing the needs of the local population. If valid needs exist, the PRT will explore ways to help the community without a quid pro quo for poppy eradication.

WOOD